

Produced by and for autistic people

Asperger *United*

Edition 91 July 2017



Asperger United

Asperger United is a magazine run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-sixteens). The magazine aims to put people who have the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *AU* receives over 200 letters each quarter so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into. *AU* protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names unless the writer asks for his or her full name to be used.

Asperger United is free. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. We ask for a contribution of £9 per year from overseas readers and £15 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs. Please make cheques payable to the NAS. Organisations requiring multiple copies: no extra fee, please get in touch.

Editor: the Goth

National Autistic Society production support: the Publications Team

NAS phone support: the Supporter Care Team

Asperger United was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of the National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce and the current editor, the Goth (who does not wear black).

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most "appropriate name" for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Kaczynski, formerly Cohen.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

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Tel: **0808 800 1050** (free from most landlines) or
Tel: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)

All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list — free of charge.

Thank you to Graeme Lawson for producing the *AU* logo.

Please note that the views expressed in *Asperger United* are not necessarily those of the editor, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the magazine.

Asperger United is available in **large print** on A3 sheets (double the size of this page). If you need large print, please let us know using the email address or postal address above.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *AU* by **14 August 2017**

Welcome to the July edition of *Asperger United*.

My heart is heavy with the main piece of news this quarter. *Asperger United* will no longer be a free paper magazine after the October issue. I am sorry that this change has to happen so quickly.

This announcement will be distressing for many of you. I have spent a long time thinking about the consequences, planning what I was going to say to you.

I wish I knew what to say to make this easier.

No big change is easy for anyone. I think it's a myth that we are worse at coping with change than others. Anyone who is too stressed cannot cope with change; anyone who is pushed over the

edge will melt down. We are just closer to the edge.

I will see some of you at Autscope. I hope you will be gentle with me, and I understand that you will need to let your feelings out. I won't take anything you say personally.

Because this announcement is so important, it will be made again with more details on page 9, and again by Mark Lever on the back cover, as it is important that you read about it, and I know that my editorial is the part of the magazine that the fewest people read, so I hope you forgive me for taking up so much of *AU* with upsetting news,

the Editor

the announcement edition — suggestion for next issue on page 5

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about the changes to *AU*
by Mark Lever, CEO of the NAS

Sergeant Smith

by Elizabeth

Lizzie Moppet was five years old and hated school.

This was no ordinary hate, it was born out of fear, dread and bewilderment. In her case, it wasn't an educational experience at all, and there was no real point in her being there. Soon, a reason for going would be presented to her.

Her arrival at school always began with uncontrollable weeping. She did her best not to do this because it drew people's attention to her. She felt embarrassed that she couldn't control herself, but it was no good. Try as she might, the prospect of yet another day in this unnatural, mind-numbing hell-hole, was more than she could bear.

At home, her family tried bribery. "Look," said her father, "if you can manage not to cry tomorrow morning, this thruppenny bit will be yours!" This was to miss the point but was well meant. Lizzie was too desperate to care about the coin and was already trying her best.

Her mother, never strong on patience, was running out of it after months of no improvement. Her husband's methods of dealing with the problem were clearly not working and she saw his softly-softly approach as spoiling. What this child needed was a good talking to.

The day came when Mrs Moppet's patience ran out completely. Once again, Lizzie shamefacedly admitted that she had disrupted the class by sobbing. She had tried not to, but it was no good. Her mother became firm.

"Now you listen to me!" she said, "This has got to stop! No one likes school! I hated it more than anyone — but I still had to go!" Lizzie had heard this argument before. It did nothing to help her. This time her mother took it further.

"Children must go to school because it's the law!" she declared. "If they're not sent to school then it's their parents that get into trouble! Oh, yes! It's not the child that gets into trouble — the police come and take away the father! They put him in prison and all the family starve on the streets! Homeless! Do you understand?" Her voice was shrill, rising with a dramatic sense of panic before adding, "It's all down to you!"

Lizzie believed every word her mother said. She could not imagine living without her father and resolved to save him from the police at all costs. With so much seeming to depend on it, she stopped crying and became dangerously withdrawn. Her spirit broken and her will to live now dead, she suffered the worst mental abuse without a whimper.

Unable to fathom Lizzie's real problem, the grown-ups were delighted. She was now a quiet child that was no trouble to anyone. In fact, she went through the motions of her day-to-day school life like a programmed automaton. She lived in dread that her real thoughts and feelings would break out again, or become known to the police, and her father would be taken.

One day, after school, she was sitting in her father's study on her own drawing horses as usual. Her mother was getting the tea. Lizzie loved the peace and quiet of her father's study. Better still, he would soon be home.

The study door was in the hallway, adjacent to the front door of the house. This was convenient for her father as he worked from home, and spent his days coming and going.

She heard the front door open and ran to the hall expecting to be whisked off her feet, to hug father's neck and kiss his cheek just as she usually did when he came home. What she saw made her

feature (continued) and a notice

stop dead in her tracks. Her father was not alone — there was a stranger with him. Furthermore, this was no ordinary stranger. He was tall and official-looking — and dressed in black. A policeman!

“Lizzie!” exclaimed her father, “Come and say hello to Sergeant Smith!”

Lizzie couldn’t speak — or move. The police had found out about her. How could she save her father now?

“C’mon, Lizzie, say hello” he coaxed. Lizzie couldn’t.

“I don’t think she’s going to,” said Sergeant Smith, in an effort to be pleasant. Her father could see it was hopeless. Unable to spend time with her, he took his hands off his knees and straightened up. His voice became official. “Come on through, Sergeant,” he said, and the door of the front room closed behind them.

Some seconds passed before Lizzie could rally her wits and move from the spot. She walked slowly into the back room where her mother was getting the tea. Trance-like, she hauled herself onto the seat of an armchair by the fire and stared at the flames, her feet dangling above the floor.

Any minute now, Lizzie’s mother would know the whole truth. Her father taken, the family home lost. Lizzie felt sick and helpless.

Suddenly, men’s voices were heard in the hall; the front door opening, then closing. Had they

left then? Why had her father been so cheerful about it? Grown-ups were weird.

She was surprised to hear footsteps cross the hall and her father appear in the doorway. “That was Sergeant Smith,” he told his wife, “He came about the thefts at the top of the dock.” Thefts?

Lizzie’s father worked for the local port authority. It was because of his job that Sergeant Smith had called on him. She hadn’t thought of that. She stared at her father incredulously.

“Well, tea’s ruined,” said her mother, “and Lizzie won’t eat. She won’t do anything I tell her. She might listen to you.”

“Of course she will!” said her father lifting her gently out of the armchair and onto his lap. “Come on, Lizzie, let’s eat,” he said, “I’m starving!”

Lizzie’s eyes were wide and unblinking, like glistening beads specking the pallor of her haggard little face. She couldn’t believe this unexpected change of events. Her father’s expression changed to one of concern and his voice softened. “What is it?” he asked.

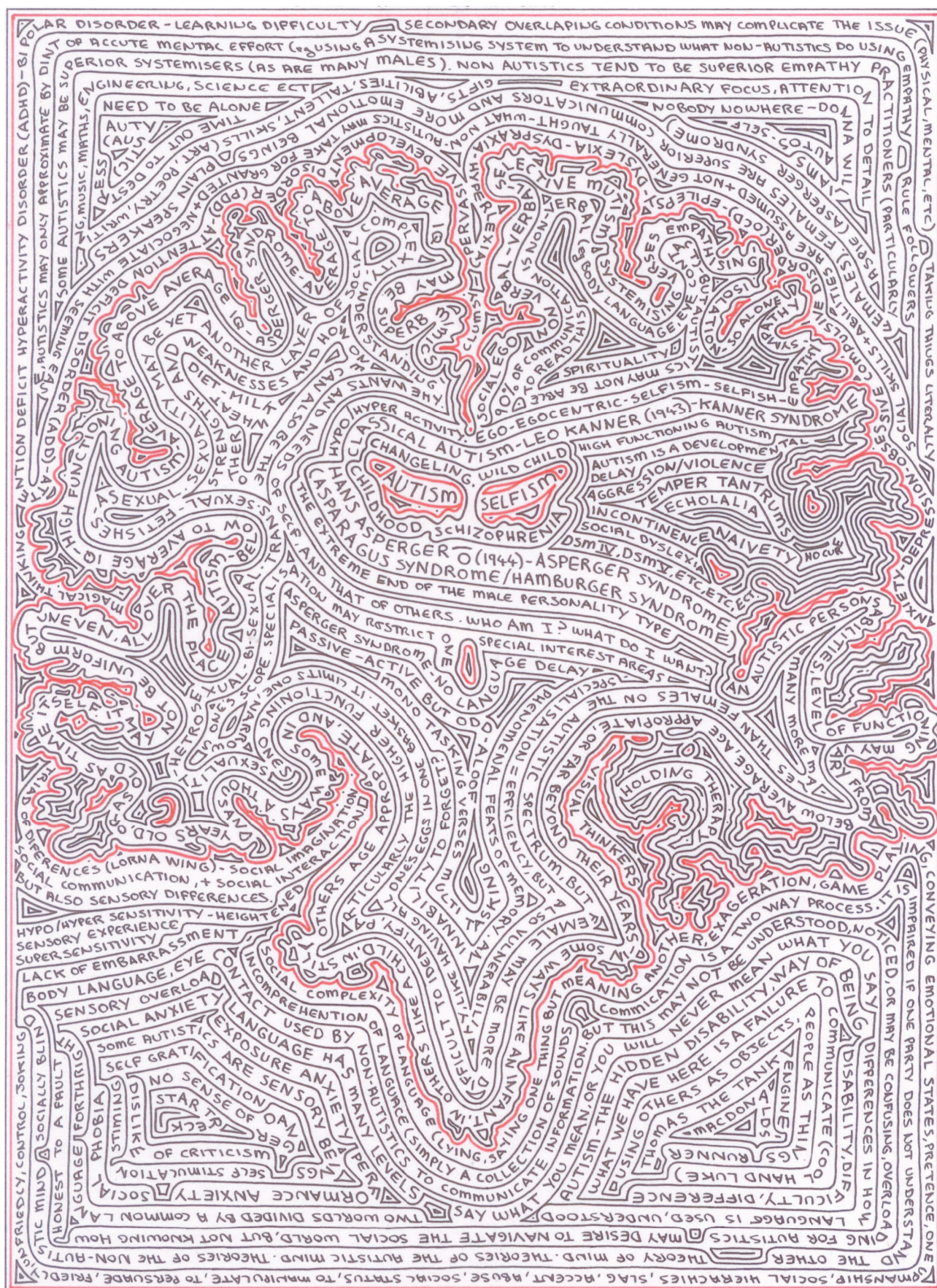
Lizzie could no more speak than she could eat. Instead, she flung her skinny little arms around his neck and hugged him as if her very life depended on it. “I’ll never let him go!” she thought, “Never! Never! Never!”

In the background, her mother sighed. “You know, you spoil that child,” she said, plugging in the iron, “It’s no wonder she’s like she is.”

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for October will be **the changes that are happening to *Asperger United***. (If you haven’t read about these yet, please see my editorial and the back-page announcement.) This subject includes the effects of the changes on you, any questions you have about the changes, and any other points you want to raise. Vote with your

contributions: the more submissions on a subject sent in (from different people) the more likely that that subject will be the theme. Writing on any subject is still welcome (though I have a feeling this one will produce lots of letters) as are ideas for new themes, and artwork. Remember, if you want to see different content in *AU*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

a drawing



Autism, part one, by Peter Myers

Pen pals

Pen pal number 245

Hello, my name is Michael and I have a condition known as Asperger's syndrome. I am writing to ask you if you would be able to find a suitable pen friend aged 40-60 who suffers from the same condition as me (Asperger's). I sometimes find it difficult to form relationships with other people. I am willing to give it a try.

My hobbies are gardening, looking after my elderly mother, who lives on her own, travelling, collecting postcards, cooking, reading, researching topics on the Internet, watching the BBC news, watching *Songs of praise*, and employment. (I also like *Coronation street*.)

I am employed as a part-time data-entry clerk for a Christian charity called Prospects for People with Learning Difficulties. The people are really caring and understanding towards my condition and I get on really well with them.

I have two other Asperger friends who I see. Occasionally, they come over to my flat and I cook for them and give them hospitality and I make them feel welcome.

I have my own flat which I have lived in for nearly twenty-nine years and it has a communal garden. (I have a separate piece of border with two dahlias, three pots which I colour with plants each summer.)

This Easter I travelled with my mother with a coach party to Worcestershire, the heart of Central England, for a few days.

I look forward to hearing from you!

How to place a pen-pal advert

- All you need to do is send your advert along with your name and address (and email address if you want) to *Asperger United*. You can use the Royal Mail or email. The next pen-pal number will be given to your advert when it arrives.
- Please note that *AU* does not print dating adverts, as it is unable to provide suitable support.
- Those under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen-pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.
- If you get no replies, please don't take this personally.

How to reply to pen pals

- Please remember to let us know the name and number of the person whom your letter is for. (All pen pals are numbered by the editor, not the person who sends in the advert.)
- Please remember to put your address on your letter.
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG, or email asp.utd@nas.org.uk
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all pen-pal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.

****Important notice — please read****

Asperger United is happy to publish pen-pal advertisements but we must stress that we are not a pen-pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first letter, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society / *Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter-writers.

Eleven pen-pal adverts have been held over for publication in the next three issues, Editor.

Pen pal number 246

Hi, I am Lana. I am 25 years old and I live in Wales. I was diagnosed with high-functioning Asperger's at the age of 13. I love animals and have two dogs. I love listening to music, classical and pop. I like walking, being down by the beach, and like going for meals out.

I am a quiet person.

I would like to hear from anyone like myself.

Pen pal number 247

Hi, my name is Steph, I am 26 years old. I live in Derby and I have Asperger's.

I like anything and everything animal-related, I have two dogs, a rabbit, a corn snake, an albino Californian king snake, two hamsters, a praying mantis and some fish.

I collect the National Geographic *Real-life bugs* and the *Game of thrones* figurines and the *Star wars* helmets.

I like reading, video games, watching tv and movies.

I'd like to hear from anyone with similar interests.

Pen pal number 248

Hello, my name is Bernadette.

I'm a friendly caring person looking for anyone who would like a pen-pal. I am 28 (I'm not sure why that matters but people seem to like to know).

I love *The big bang theory*, Alanis Morissette, my cats and my niblings. However my field of interest is so wide and varied I could not list them all. What I can always depend on is music, arts, crafts, photography and DIY. I can be lost for hours in something that I love.

I am a very open minded person or at least I tried to be. I am queer and gender-questioning. So whilst I am physically female I do not identify as that.

Would be lovely to hear from you, whether we share anything in common or not. I look forward to hearing from you. :)

Pen pal number 249

I'm looking for a pen pal who likes heavy metal, bikes, mafia films, films and books.

I would help in any way I can,

JRC Ferguson

PS. I am a good friend, and also listen good.

Pen pal number 250

Hi, my name is Rob. I'm 24 years old from Middlesbrough. I found an article written in *Asperger United* by someone who had similar interests, so I decided to write one myself.

My hobbies and interests are meeting my friends, going to cinemas, watching TV, travelling and sightseeing big cities. I like TV shows such as *the Simpsons*, *the Inbetweeners*, *Futurama* and *Friends*.

One of my recent hobbies was trainers and I had an obsession with them. I've stopped buying them now though, because I have a bit more than enough.

I also like anime, such as *Death note*, and other dark anime.

I love playing games like *Star wars: battlefront*, as I'm a huge *Star wars* fan. I'm also quite a Batman fanatic and have plenty of animated films, and games such as *Batman: Arkham City*.

I am really ambitious about travelling, especially to visit the likes of America and Australia. I also like going to theme parks.

Thank you.

Pen pal number 251

I am 13 and my name is Jessica. Have recently been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. If there are any people who I can talk to or be friends with.

Why read fiction?

by Jack Vhiles

It often feels like autistic people are against reading fiction. Some don't see the point, as it's "only" a story.

Novels, by definition, are not just stories, even though people often use the words interchangeably. Novels say something new (novel) about the human condition, and they do this by posing subtle questions for the reader, such as "Why did she say such nasty things and then help him?" — if this sort of question is not occurring to you while you read a novel, then maybe that's why you don't see the point in reading them.

Often, what the author is trying to say is too difficult to say directly, as fact. The way people think and behave is very complex. (I hope you'll agree with that!) Getting the reader to question what is going on and why — why the author chose to write the book, why they chose to have that character behave that way — this is the purpose of the author of a novel.

Some books don't try to say anything new, but, for example, are written just to entertain (page-turners) or puzzle (whodunnits). But

even whodunnits *can* be novels, and the very best always are — such as the Morse series written by Colin Dexter. The Morse books leave you free to enjoy the story, or to think about the novel, which is an advantage over the "pure" novel.

(I notice, by the way, that *AU* always calls fictional pieces stories, even when they're novel, but I guess it's good enough to have a basic description in this context, given many readers don't like fiction or don't understand the point of fiction. In the circumstances, I think it's best to let the reader decide what's novel.)

If you ever try writing something, you'll realise that you can only write about real life, ultimately. Either you use incidents and characters based on real incidents and people, or you copy another author. That author is in the same position: they use real life or they copy another author, and so on, ad infinitum. So all fiction is ultimately based on real life, even if it is set in another galaxy. That's what allows it to be novel; to talk about the human condition. Read and enjoy!

News on the resubscription project, and *Asperger United* moving to the web

notice by the Goth

The resubscription project has ended. With *Asperger United* as an online magazine (please see my editorial and the back page for more information on this) there will be no need to have a subscription to *Asperger United*, though you will still be able to sign up for the e-mail notification of when a new edition is uploaded. If you have already signed up for this, you are going to continue to receive these.

I am sorry to all of you, but this particular apology is for those who've taken the trouble to resubscribe only to be disappointed, to lose their subscription to the paper magazine anyway.

I am sorry that those of you with no Internet access will have to make new arrangements for getting hold of a print-out. You can still send letters.

I am sorry to those who receive the large-print edition. On the plus side, for you, I will be doing my best to optimise the online pages so that they work well with screen readers. Please let me know what problems your screen reader has with the online version (when it appears) and I will do my best to fix them.

Change is hard. As Editor of *AU* I will do my best to support you.

letter to the Editor

Dear Goth,

I am long overdue writing this letter to you. It has been in my mind ever since I first encountered *AU* magazine. Years have passed since then and I must thank you for *Asperger United* magazine (*AU*). You cannot know how much it helped me in the weeks, no years, after my late diagnosis at the age of 67 years. As you can probably imagine, I've always been aware of being different and sometimes being a troubled soul who never really fitted in, very solitary as a result. Diagnosis helped me to understand myself and why things have happened the way they have.

Your magazine helped me to accept myself as I am, and it meant a great deal to me to realize I was not alone or a freak, just different. Gold is listed as Au on the atomic table and in my mind I saw your magazine as my Gold Magazine. It was amazing to read the articles you published and to really relate to what your writers were getting at. I had kindred souls.

One article stands out in my mind because it made me feel so sad for the writer — I think he was called Tom. He wondered if the Aspie gene should be tested for in unborn babies, and, if found, the pregnancy terminated.

This young fellow had obviously suffered as a result of being an Aspie, and had probably experienced emotional and physical abuse, as many of us have suffered at the hands of NTs. In the past there were times when I too felt so overwhelmed by the pain of rejection; my whole life has been a search for meaning and I will not allow ignorance to triumph over understanding.

I still suffer but I feel it's not for nothing because I think the Asperger/autistic gene is important to humanity as a whole. Many of the world's greatest people past and present, that have changed the course of human history and contributed a great deal to humanity's progress, are now thought to have had Asperger's syndrome. Visual thinking and thinking "outside the box" has brought progress in the arts and sciences. Albert Einstein, Hans Anderson and

the artist Kandinsky are but a small example of such people. If the Aspie gene was erased by abortion the race as a whole would be poorer.

Be proud of who you are! Most of us struggle through life without doing great things, but at least we carry a gene that has great potential and no matter how marginalised we are, we can take comfort in that fact.

I'm sorry if I have gone on too much. I seem to have nothing to say one minute and then too much the next. I find social situations uncomfortable and spend most of my time alone thinking of life and what it means. After seventy-plus years I have a lot of accumulated experience and I would be very happy if anyone else could benefit from it.

You are welcome to use anything I send you in *AU* magazine. I write a lot, draw and compose poems. I have often thought of sending stuff to you as I have had clear ideas about most of the topics you suggest but have never contributed.

When I started this letter it was really just to say a very sincere thank you, but as usual I seem to have gone off on a tangent. I wish you all the best,

sincerely yours,

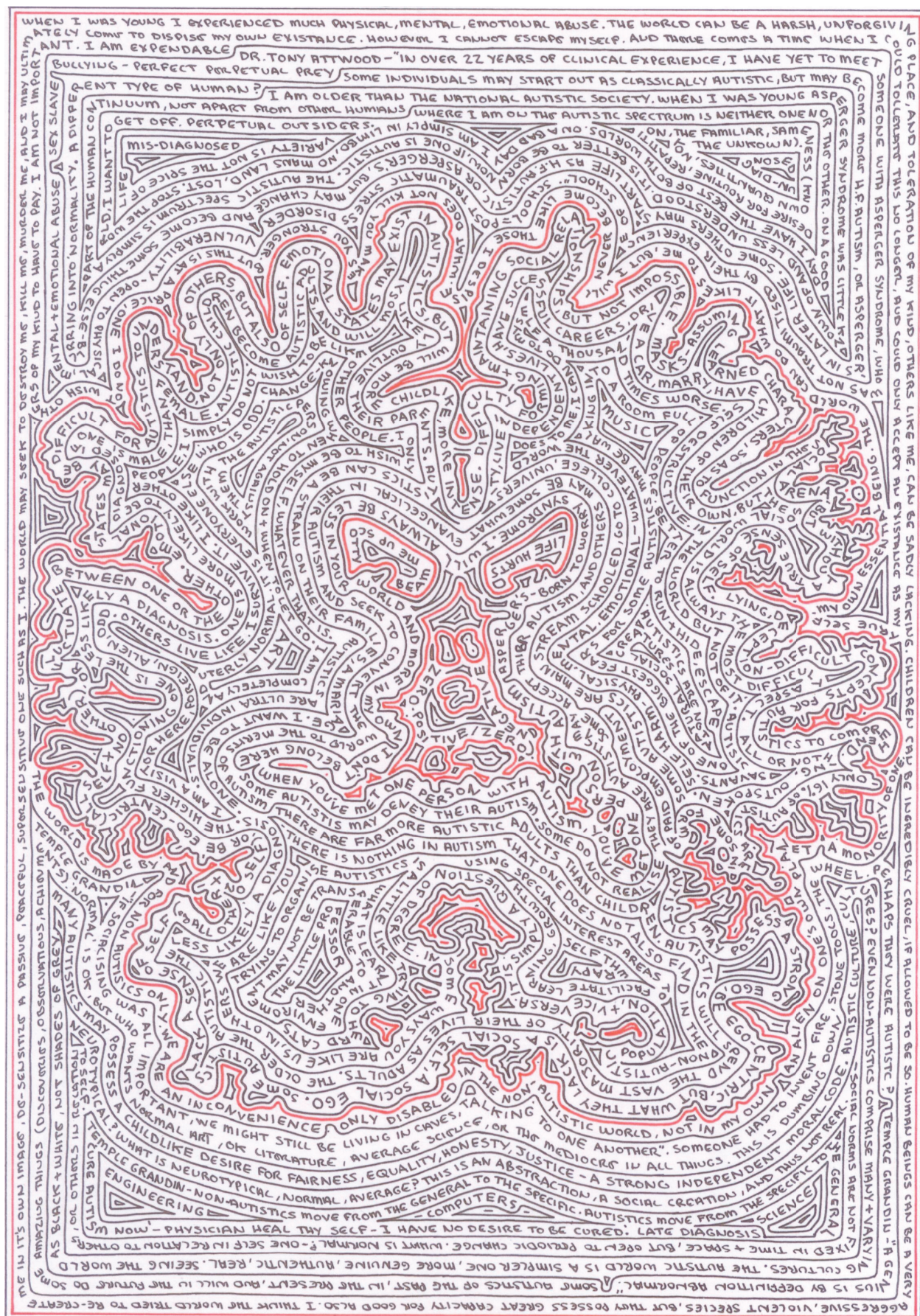
Sinaan

PS. I hope you are able to read my writing. My printer is kaput.

Thank you, Sinaan. Just for information, it is reckoned that between three and eight genes are involved in autism, with some researchers believing the number is much higher, nearer thirty.

It was Tom's pain that pushed me to publish his letter, as I know from the letters I get that pain is common.

No one need worry about going on too much: as Editor I would simply edit out extra words! Your handwriting is very clear, and I shall look forward to future contributions of any sort, Editor.



Autism, part two, by Peter Myers

Runaway horses

part two

by Lois

I kept driving myself on to find out more despite people telling me to slow down, give myself time to digest, but they didn't understand I was on a life-and-death mission. A mission to understand and make sense of me. I couldn't live in a no-man's-land of not knowing if I had this thing. I had to know. What began by trying to prove everyone wrong quickly turned into a desperate search to understand what made me tick.

I started to see how the triad of impairments the clinician had mentioned related to me, especially around communication with other people. I had flashbacks of parts of my life which made no sense at the time but looking back at them through an Aspergic filter, they became clearer.

It started to make sense to me why so many of my relationships had failed. Why I had struggled to make friends and maintain those relationships. I could never quite "get" how relationships and friendships were supposed to work. I had tried to copy what I saw other people doing with ease, yet, when I tried to emulate them, I could never get it quite right. I was always slightly off the mark and would invariably end up annoying or upsetting someone. I was constantly confused and bewildered by people and social interactions. No one gave me a manual, how to do this "people" thing, and I had blundered through life distancing people from me because I would so often come across as demanding or aloof or abrupt, when all I wanted was to make friends and be part of the group. So I learned not to talk to people unless I had to. It was safer that way. Hurt less. I read on an email signature recently from an Aspergic lady, "Just because I don't talk to you, doesn't mean I don't want to." I can relate to that.

The research I was doing continued to pile on the evidence of how other people who had Asperger's had experienced similar difficulties. They too were always looking in on the world from the outside. They too never quite fitted in. They too were never part of the in-crowd.

Occasionally I could pretend to be one of the gals but it exhausted me and I would need to come home to peace and quiet and recharge my batteries. Socialising, even just talking to people at work, was exhausting and it had got more exhausting the older I was getting.

Some time ago, I'm not sure when, I had decided I was safer on my own. I could shut the world out and find peace in my garden. Life was too much hard work, too bewildering and upsetting. I was only going to talk to someone if I had to, which usually meant going to work four days a week to earn enough to keep a roof over my head. Any extra socialising was only carried out on rare days when I felt able to cope with the demands it placed on me. This could be as little as once every six months and that was fine with me.

I knew my life was small and getting smaller but I found peace and tranquillity in my wildlife garden. Here I could let my hair down, be me, no pressure, no one demanding anything of me.

As my anxieties raced out of control on an almost daily basis, I started to notice the coping strategies I could put into place to help alleviate them. Being in my garden was and still is, a coping strategy. I find the brain a marvellous organ which can respond to external stimuli in the blink of an eye — just smelling a rose brings me down to earth. I have sensory oversensitivity and this means my sense of smell is heightened,

a story (continued) and a book review

so too is sensitivity to light and noise but the smell thing can be a benefit.

Smelling the roses for me is more than just a sensual experience. The aroma reaches deep into my soul and causes child-like giggles. My lungs feel soothed, my skin feels stroked, my feet feel light and I feel at one with nature. I become a rose. A lilac bush can have a similar affect. A *Skimmia* bush is in full flower in

my front garden at the moment and it's honey-like pollen calls me daily to indulge my senses and when I sniff it gently, I drift away to some peaceful part of heaven that only I have access to.

Someone without Asperger's and sensory sensitivities doesn't have access to my little piece of heaven. I am grateful this part of heaven has my name on it.

Two boys kissing

by **David Levithan**

Alfred A Knopf Books

ISBN: 978 1 40526 443 3

£7.99 / \$9.95

review by **Luke**

The book talks about seven characters from the LGBT community: there are "Peter and Neil who are a couple but their kisses are different. Avery and Ryan have only just met and are trying to figure out what happens next. Cooper is alone and he's not sure how he feels" and then finally "Harry and Craig who are not a couple, but are both aged 15 and they want to break the world record for the longest kiss, of thirty-two hours, thirty minutes and forty-seven seconds, and they perform this kiss in their high-school car park in front of everyone."

Throughout the world record attempt, the two lads go through a difficult time, as they must deal with damaging slurs, from drunken men in cars to one of the lads' mothers finding out the hard way that her son is gay. Through all these events Harry and Craig must not break the seal

of their kiss or the world record attempt will have been for nothing.

To follow Harry and Craig's journey, then, it's a must-read, it's a really heart-warming story and heart-breaking in parts of the book, but if you're ASD and are either transgender, gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning it's the book to read, even if you're a young LGBTQ member too.

I am gay and it upsets me to see LGBTQ people bullied for being who they want to be. If you're ASD and LGBTQ and are being bullied for being different, report it, please don't suffer in silence, because you are not alone. Thank you.

This book is available from all good bookshops.

An unexpected journey

by Ann P

I'm so pleased this month's subject is fiction. I know most Aspies tend to prefer fact-based books but I think that fantasy is something that has always helped me to get a reasonably good perspective on the real world. I've always compared everyday situations to settings and characters in storybooks and films, which both makes matters much more interesting and also helps me to understand them better in a way.

Although I have always loved books such as *Midnight is a place* by Joan Aiken, *Zorro* by Isabelle Allende, *Anne of Green Gables* by LM Montgomery, and the Harry Potter series, one novel that really made an impression on me and actually helped me out during a pretty sticky yet ultimately rewarding turning point in my life was *The hobbit* by JRR Tolkien.

I know most people in the world have read *The hobbit* and become enchanted by it but I didn't actually read it for the first time until a few months before the first of the three films starring Martin Freeman came out. I don't think I actually read it for that particular reason: my curiosity just suddenly got the better of me and I decided that I would try it.

To tell the truth, it wasn't as if I was a complete stranger to the story. When I was small I used to sometimes take audio book cassettes with me to my Greek grandmother's house in Corfu (I'm half Greek, half Irish and grew up there till I was 18; I now reside in London) when I would sleep over there with my younger brother: I would listen to them in the dark via my portable radio and earphones. *The hobbit* was one of these audio books but because of all the dwarves' names in the beginning I would tend to get rather confused: then by the time the party had gate-crashed the trolls' moonlit dinner my confusion would usually have led to sleepiness and I would begin to nod off.

My dad also once helped my brother to copy down all of Bilbo and Gollum's riddles from a Greek version of the book (my own copy of the book is in English) to help with a primary school assignment. My brother and my parents would often watch *The lord of the rings* trilogy on DVD. I was never that much interested in them (probably because the constant peril and unfamiliar references bored me) though I did have a kind of horrified fascination for Smeagol.

Anyway, as I was saying, I first borrowed *The hobbit* from the library and was instantly hooked.

I loved and deeply sympathized with poor little Bilbo. The greatest dilemma that's ever been presented to him: the peaceful prospect of staying behind in the beautiful sunshine beside the Water and eating his second breakfast in the dining-room — or the beckoning uncertainty of adventure in the great unknown. I understood his constant wishes to go home whenever the going got tough, shared his awe for Beorn the skin-changer and his revolt for the giant spiders, empathized with his reluctance to take charge, fell under the spell of Smaug's eye and words . . .

I bought an audio book of the novel and saw all three films (which I did quite enjoy, though I thought the book a unique treasure in itself).

And that was pretty much it — until I started my first ever proper job.

I began working as a support worker at a local autism day centre. I had previously been a member of the Tuesday evening social group, which led to about six months' volunteering in the office, which eventually led to the position! I was over the Moon, especially after about three years of fruitless unpaid work for other companies, gruelling interviews and endless job applications, all following my graduation.

Though it was an interesting start it was a difficult one too. Due to my Asperger's syndrome it takes me a long time to get into the swing of things. I got on very well with everyone and they were all extremely nice: I was astonished that despite the fact I had always expected everything to run like clockwork in a day centre — particularly in one for autism (daily routines, habits and all that) — it was in fact very much the opposite. Everything was unpredictable, even the clients themselves. I had never known many autistic people and I had expected them to be more or less like me. Not so.

The blow really seemed to fall when my manager — who had initially given me the job and to whom I had grown very close — announced her resignation.

I knew we were going to keep in touch but I missed her terribly. Not only that, a lot of other people I had become familiar with during my time there were leaving too. It was now about three or four months since I had started and I still had not completely found my feet in the job: I was afraid that without someone to lean on everything would come crashing down.

Though I loved the activities I performed with the clients during the day — swimming, drama, shopping, music, market stalls and so on — I still struggled to cope with changes in the routine and the idiosyncrasies of the clients. I had never felt so on my own before and I would phone up my mum and dad in Greece in the evenings in consternation.

They were extremely encouraging. They assured me that I was doing very well and that, due to my autism, all this was natural and that it would take me a lot longer to settle in than other people. They also believed it would prove to be a very good experience for me and that it would really help to develop my independence: I could cope without having someone to cling onto.

I was upset after a long week and though I felt much better after the talk I was still feeling doubtful the next morning. I didn't know what to think.

And then it hit me. I was just like Bilbo Baggins! Despite his inhibitions, he had sacrificed his idyllic life in Bag End to go off on an adventure (just like I had set out to find a job): Gandalf soon leaves the group (just like our manager had left) and had entrusted the dwarves into Bilbo's care (just like our manager had entrusted the clients into mine)! And as for my Asperger's syndrome — my Asperger's syndrome probably represented the ring! It's a useful attribute at times, albeit a bit of a bummer at others when it appears to let me down. Fancy!

I went to brush my teeth with a slowly widening smile on my face — one which invisibly hovered there for the rest of the day. I finally had a character I could look up to whom I could compare myself to! I've always had plenty of fictional heroes with whom I felt I shared certain traits but none of them had been in a similar situation to me up till then (as far as I knew).

Bilbo is a wonderful role model. He is bold even when he is afraid; he is reluctant at times yet he will still make himself go on. He longs for his singing kettle — just as I long for my cup of tea in front of the TV! He makes mistakes just like anyone. We both complain — and yet it will probably do us a great deal of good in the end!

Since then I have felt much better at work. Even when the going occasionally gets a little tough I feel much more confident and capable: I've been there for over a year now and everyone says they've noticed the difference in me and tell me how much I've grown in the time I've been there. I've even had to be left in charge every so often and although I didn't find it a particularly enjoyable experience at times, I still managed to keep the boat from sinking and felt quite proud of myself afterwards! For some time now I have even helped to run the social group I used to be a member of — it's quite different from working in the day centre but I like it very much and I always feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of an evening.

My own unexpected journey — I wonder if there's a Smaug near the end of it!

Dear Editor,

as we all have similar issues with obsessional behaviour, as it is pretty much in our mindsets more often than not as it gives us security and a safe distraction from the confusing world that is in our own everyday lives.

I'm definitely obsessional, though the hoarding has eased a lot over the years as I have, through close friends, now come to realise it can make life more and more difficult. It is a good idea to learn to control it. Don't let it control you.

Years ago I was unemployed and on sickness benefits, my mobility had all but ceased, though I have to say that as time went on I had a hip replacement and then began my climb back up the employment ladder (one thing to remember, is to tell the employer that you have autism. It's fear in us all that causes self-confidence to fall rapidly. It's tempting to be the opposite and not mention anything, but then if a complaint or hostile response is made then it can't be dealt with as you didn't let the company know the truth).

On collecting, I'm sure there will be a lot of you that have a collection of items that are nurtured and loved even if over the course of time it becomes one of many collections. I had a stamp collection when I was a child but soon realised just how many stamps there were and the prices were varied though steep to say the least.

I decided to take up the guitar with the intention of being a rock guitarist by the time I was 19. I still play a bit though I have got the art bug and acrylics have now become my hobby. I don't go out buying every single tube of paint as much as I would love to but there we go.

For a long time, I collected books, on different subjects on the ancient world from Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the gods* — I have a few of his books and others on the same subject. I have a small collection of books on nuclear war. A sensitive subject that hasn't ever really gone away. One or two books are chilling but then the era lasted forty years.

Our world is different. We have our own worlds where the world becomes like a window looking out from behind.

I always imagined that those walking past couldn't see whether I was too engrossed in my own imaginative palette of colours held together by Jean-Michel Jarre tapes. His music is peaceful and image-provoking as I love to see the stream of movies in my mind as I listen to the musician who is sharing his own love of electronic music. His collection of music equipment is very big.

Now I move on to books and writing. I've already mentioned one or two subjects of many that I like, though I use the superstring theory as they all seem to stem off each other. I have always enjoyed science fiction, particularly as I have been busy writing a book of my own. I've been writing since I was 14. I'm on my way to 41, still a youthful 19 years old at heart. *The red hand gang* of the 1970s was my first influence on writing though my story had boats, jet-powered boats, that could do one thousand miles per hour. These had guns and missiles. A floating island that floated around like a piece of ice. The kids in this were the same age as me. Looking back, I realised that few kids could drive such a boat.

The imagination is a powerful tool that unfortunately lacks a rewind button. To do this would require the use of a brain-computer interface where the computer can show thoughts and replay the videos of one's mind with the aid of a cap to record the signals like a tv converts the signal into a picture. A book would be written before pen had gone to paper. A dream at night could be the bestseller of the morning.

At the present moment in time I use a laptop. Sadly the 14-year-old's papers were thrown out so it was lost forever. Only recently I tried to remember what the story was about. A writing teacher gave me a title for it, we worked on it up until around about five years ago, then I brought it up myself. The human factor is taking longer as I need to give each character a personality. Consistency is difficult and after a busy shift it is too tiring to go into.

The vision reader would be so useful to have, and in a decade will replace the need for joypads for computers. It will read and present 100% of a mind on an iPad. Courts of justice can use it for cases, no one can lie, it's all there on screen.

Whether or not this device will arrive in the next decade is a matter for debate. Would it breach human rights? The motives for using it are different to the motives for using eye-gaze computer programmes that people with neurological illnesses like motor neurone disease use. The visual thinking where such a device could be modified so that these people could play a game on the computer, moving the avatars around by thought alone, a virtual reality world.

Can anyone imagine how well we could survive on a super-Earth? Who would go? Is the human race civilised enough to have a colony without the lack of intelligence that comes with turning against each other, power, greed and selfishness? Can we create a Vulcan civilisation, “logical, Commander” — or was it “affirmative, Captain” — without the need for gluing the one-take frames together every five minutes to connect the whole picture.

Please send a reply if you have any memories of the series called *Machine gunners*, *Red hand gang*, *Starfleet X bomber* and *Mysterious cities of gold*?

Also ideas for messages to be sent to outer space like Voyager 1 and 2 and Pioneer 10 and 11 — Cassini had one too — any ideas for a future way to do the message.

Funding

Funding organisations can be a very difficult objective, though I believe that it would be possible to achieve government grants to aid the funding and long-term survival of the resources that people with autism need.

There is also lottery funding. A company can be allocated enough financial support to buy premises to keep going from strength to strength.

If our voices are heard as well as parents, teachers, carers, support workers, employers and so on, then it is likely to have a positive effect on the government's decision.

Sadly, Brexit is on the cards, so it isn't a time where anyone will be in the frame of mind to work on matters closer to home than worrying about the silliest mistake in the new century. There are autistic people everywhere in the world, some lucky to have help and guidance, but there are others who have little. In wars the innocent suffer, well everyone does, they certainly do.

A petition, signed by everyone who agrees with the ideas that I have submitted for funding by the government or the lottery.

The funding can be given to the NAS who then distribute it amongst its headquarters.

If enough people suggested a monthly funding mechanism then it would be in the government's best interests to help those of us that need help and support or to socialise.

My whining and moaning is typical of a Tuesday night. The news isn't ever cheerful and sculptures that cost tens of thousands of pounds — the money could be better spent on improving services, including mental-health services.

Please write articles for the magazine that lead to ideas that local groups could liaise on. My local one is ARGH — Autism Rights Group Highland.

A useful addresses list in *AU* for the area England-Scotland-Wales-Northern-Ireland. A directory for people to research, contact.

I hope the ideas are useful to you at *AU*.

Thanks again for a great mag. Some more artwork and pictures of groups, and so on.

Also leading articles from one or two groups is another way to gain interest from further afield,

Danny

a letter

Dear Goth,

really enjoyed the articles and letters in edition 90: from Melissa Joy on *Realize your talents and pursue your dreams* — yes.

Also, from Glen, *Travellers*.

And Tracey.

And the article by Philip — George Orwell.

Why? They were upbeat, interesting and go beyond “Boo-hoo, poor me, it’s so awful, I’m doomed.” The psychologist at my assessment told me that I can learn how to do things, that my life is not doomed. That I can learn, grow and be a fully functioning human being. It gives me courage to take baby steps, and be okay about making mistakes — see them all as learning opportunities.

Rant over.

Thanks for putting together the magazine — it’s typo-free, on time, and always organized. What sort of photos do you and readers want to see? I take photos of flowers — too boring? Thanks and bye,

Wendy

Ideas for themes:

1) Special interests — interesting hobbies and passions, especially where the Aspie has innovated, invented something from fusing two unrelated fields together.

So, not . . . walking the dog, but build a system of pulleys that takes the dog on a walk through the orchard (I made that up).

Or something using wind or solar power to heat their bathtub, or who has started growing veggies on a city rooftop, XXX their community, or who has learnt Greek so they can go on an archaeology dig . . .

2) Tips for getting fit or staying healthy. It’s easy to forget to go into the fresh air, take your vitamins and supplements when you’re (I’m) hyperfocused.

3) Communications tips: situations that have been handled better with a tip from an NT . . . communication is hard . . .

4) How to get out of the big black hole of gloom and doom or boredom: what have others done? How do they notice early warning signs that they’re slipping down into negativity and hopelessness?

5) Most inspiring people in their life and why.

6) Tips for dyspraxia, dyslexia . . . basic IT advice, such as creating backups of your documents, having different passwords, and so on.

Thank you, Wendy! I must admit that whenever I look back over an old issue I can usually find at least one typo, but I’m glad they’re not obvious! What do readers think of Wendy’s ideas for themes? Editor.



The rules of *Asperger United*

(contact information for AU is on page 2 and again on page 20)

- 1) *Asperger United* is funded by the NAS and readers' donations, and is independent of the NAS. Although it is called "*Asperger United*" it aims to be for the whole of the (reading) autism spectrum. That is, the concerns and joys of any autistic subscriber can be printed, not just Asperger's.
- 2) *Asperger United* is free and is quarterly, published in January, April, July and October. If you do not receive a copy when you expect to, please contact AU.
- 3) Pieces that appear in *Asperger United* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests something different. This is done to protect your privacy.
- 4) *Asperger United* administers the copyright of everything that appears and it does this on behalf of the authors.
- 5) *Asperger United* does not use your contact details for anything other than administering AU. Your details are not passed on to NAS Marketing, NAS Fundraising or any other organisation without your written permission. Please consider getting involved with the NAS campaigns and events.
- 6) If you move house, please inform *Asperger United* and include your old address as well as your new address.
- 7) Even if you've paid for the Royal Mail forwarding service (or another forwarding service if you live outside Great Britain and Northern Ireland), you still need to inform *Asperger United* that you have moved address.
- 8) If you phone and leave a message on the machine, please speak slowly and clearly and spell uncommon words, as the line isn't very clear. Please give any phone number you leave twice for the same reason. Remember to give your postal address so that we can find your record.
- 9) You do not have to be a member of the NAS to subscribe to *Asperger United*.
- 10) The current edition of *Asperger United* is available at **www.autism.org.uk/aspergerunited** You need to scroll down to the middle of the page, where there is a link to the PDF.
- 11) You can sign up for an email notifying you whenever a new edition of *Asperger United* is posted on the webpage above. Email **asp.utd@nas.org.uk** asking for the notification by email and please include your full name, postcode and let us know whether you want the paper edition too.
- 12) If you want to unsubscribe from the paper version, inform *Asperger United* and include your postal address. Or to unsubscribe from the email notification, include your email address.
- 13) If you want to resubscribe (or subscribe for the first time) inform *Asperger United* and include your postal address (for the paper version) or email address (for the email notification).
- 14) Book reviews are the most popular thing in *Asperger United*, please consider submitting one. They can be about any book, not just books about autism. Also, they do not have to be short (the Goth keeps most of his reviews short to leave more space for other writers). If you do not want your review to appear in other NAS publicity about that book, please make this clear.
- 15) Although each issue is themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the letters and articles in each issue will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel, and for fitting the space available.

Important notice, please read

Asperger United is moving to the worldwide web;
the free paper version of *Asperger United* is ending

the last free copy will be posted in October

notice by **Mark Lever, CEO of the NAS**

The National Autistic Society has produced and distributed *Asperger United* for fourteen years. It is a unique and valued publication, written and produced by and for autistic people.

This financial year, mainly due to reductions in local authority funding, the charity is having to make savings to all our charitable activities. *AU* costs about £40,000 for printing and postage.

The charity will continue to produce *Asperger United*. However, we have had to consider the best way to reduce the costs. Therefore the October issue will be the last free of charge.

We will also create an online version of the magazine. This will make *Asperger United* accessible for free to many more people, and mean that the magazine is searchable and shareable.

We realise this will be a difficult change for some readers, so we are asking as many of them as possible to complete a survey so we understand the impact of this change. We will then work with autistic colleagues and a group of autistic members of our National Forum to identify affordable options for how we can continue to provide printed copies for readers who won't be able to access an online magazine.

We will keep readers informed about these plans as they develop and seek their feedback.

Please complete the survey by 19 July 2017 at

www.autism.org.uk/AUsurvey

If you are unable to access this, please complete the paper copy, using the postage-paid envelope.

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